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SUBJECT: JORDAN'S GROWING DATE PALM INDUSTRY INCREASES REVENUES AND
CONSERVES WATER

¶1. (U) Since the mid-1990's, Jordan's Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) has encouraged Jordan Valley farmers to substitute conventional farming crops and methods with new cash crops that use water more efficiently, are environmentally friendly, and reap greater profits.

This policy has paid off with the expansion of date palm farming from just a few hectares to 2,000 hectares in 2006. Recent trade data shows that Jordanian date production increased from 400 tons in 1998 to 26,000 tons in 2006. During the same period, date exports grew from 92 tons to 22,000 tons. The main export destinations for Jordanian dates are European and Arabian Gulf markets, where the price of some varieties of the Madjool date exceed USD 40 per kilo.

¶2. (U) In mid-September, Minister of Industry and Trade Salim Khaza'aleh inaugurated the third palm date exhibition, emphasizing GOJ interest in this water-friendly line of agriculture. Jordan is one of driest countries in the world, a fact that has challenged both the government and the private sector as they explore the best ways to utilize water efficiently in agriculture, Jordan's highest and most wasteful consumer of water. Palm orchards are considered the best alternative to high water consuming crops like bananas. Not only do they consume less water, but they also tolerate poorer qualities of water such as those increasingly produced from urban wastewater treatment plants which are expected to be the only source of agricultural irrigation in the near future. NOTE: USAID has invested significantly in improving water resources and water supply in Jordan. The Kafa'a project for improving water efficiency in agriculture assisted in the establishment of a date palm nursery in the Jordan Valley to provide low-cost offshoots to farmers and train them in date palm cultivation techniques. END NOTE. Additionally, dates are cultivated in the Jordan Valley which, situated below sea level, serves as a natural greenhouse whose deep soils and frost-free environment provide an ideal growing climate.

¶3. (U) Palm date production in Jordan has increased tremendously during the last decade, and farming acreage is predicted to expand more than 300 percent within the coming year. Farmers use cutting edge technologies such as tissue culture to establish and reproduce palm trees. Many of Jordan's most popular date varieties are of U.S. origin, specifically Californian dates. The Amman FAS office has recently received an official request from the Jordanian Date Producers and Marketing Association for assistance in facilitating

and organizing a study tour to expose them to their American counterparts, including producers and suppliers. The FAS office is working on this request.

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